

THE DIARY OF A CARDINAL'S NEST.

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Plate I.

THE Cardinal (*Cardinalis cardinalis*) is a common bird here in southwestern Ohio, and is with us throughout the year. There is one pair which seems never to leave our neighborhood nor to separate, staying together the year round. Every winter we feed these birds to keep them from want, and every summer we continue to feed them because we hate to stop.

For three years they have built in our garden, the successful nests being in a heavy honeysuckle vine at a little distance from the house. Twice they built the nest close to the porch, but both times they deserted it before the eggs were laid. So, when the birds made a tour of inspection in the conservatory this spring, we had little hope of their settling in so conspicuous a place, or, at least, of their staying to raise their young. The Cardinal has the reputation of deserting his nest for slight reasons.

The Cardinals were first seen in the conservatory on the 13th of April, having entered by an open ventilator in the roof, as all the other windows were closed at that season. Birds often come by accident into the greenhouse, but usually when once inside they make wild efforts to get out, dashing against the glass and flying frantically about. The Cardinals seemed to have come in deliberately, and they showed their superior intelligence by the manner in which they grasped the situation. Walls of glass did not delude them in the least. When their inspection was finished they calmly departed by the little opening through which they had come in.

The next day they came again, and a few days later were noticed to have twigs in their beaks, as though planning a nest. On the 20th of April they selected the site — a fork in a Marechal Neil rose vine, and they began to bring in a great amount of material, which did not take definite shape until the 26th. Throughout the process of building the female gathered the material and did all the work, the male keeping close at her side,



CARDINAL, NESTING IN A CONSERVATORY.
Photographed from Nature.

and accompanying her on each trip. They worked in the morning only. The site was a difficult one for building and a great quantity of stuff was wasted before the foundation was finally established. It was interesting to observe that when a stem fell to the floor instead of lodging in the crotch where it was put, the bird never picked it up, but flew off in feverish haste for another. At one stage of the proceeding there was much more nest on the floor than in the vine. When finished, it was unusually strong and elaborate for a Cardinal's nest, which is apt to be alarmingly frail and slight. They used in it a great amount of paper. The Cardinals' nests which I have examined always contain one or two pieces of paper, but this one had an entire layer of eight or ten pieces. The supports and outer layer were of fine twigs and weed stems, the next layer paper, the next of the thin bark which they peel from grape vines and honeysuckles, and which is characteristic of all Cardinal's nests. The lining was dried grass.

The nest was completed on the first of May and the first egg was laid the next day. Four eggs were laid. The female did all the work of incubation, while the male fed her frequently. Occasionally the female would give a loud whistling call, which the male immediately obeyed, sometimes bringing her food, sometimes taking a stand near by while she went out for herself.

The conservatory in which the nest was built communicates with the dining room by means of two glass doors and with the kitchen by an open window. The nest was on a level with the eyes of a person standing in the dining room and was about five feet from one door and about eight feet from the kitchen window. The position was very exposed, as the Marechal Neil is a spindling vine, and provides not such covert of leaves as the bird usually selects. The female bird, who in the winter is much less bold than the male, was now exceedingly courageous, remaining on her nest while we watered the very plant in which it was fixed. Noises in the kitchen did not trouble her in the least. As soon as the birds began to build we scattered their seed on a shelf near by instead of in the usual place outside. They did not resort to it much until after the young were hatched. After the little ones were flown the old birds seemed to rely upon this supply altogether, coming to it many times a day.